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ABSTRACT

A study of reading textbooks for English as a second language published in Japan evaluated 150 traditional reading textbooks and 32 new reading textbooks published for use in 1985. Traditional reading textbooks are those with main texts and notes and sometimes a few comprehension questions. New reading textbooks have main texts, comprehension questions, and other exercises. The new trends identified include:•larger books with fewer pages, more visual aids, simpler English usage, more non-literary texts, more texts intended specifically for non-native speakers, more recently written main texts, more supplementary exercises, increased emphasis on language skills, more Japanese authors or co-authors, increased use of main texts written specifically for non-native speakers, more accompanying audiotapes, and more teacher's manuals. (MSE)

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A STUDY OF TRENDS OF COLLEGE ENGLISH READING TEXTBOOKS IN JAPAN: AN ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE ENGLISH READING TEXTBOOKS FOR 1985.

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A Study of Trends of College English Reading Textbooks in Japan: An Analysis of College English Reading Textbooks for 1985

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Introduction

It has been said that Japanese can read English well but cannot speak it. However, many teachers of English are convinced that it is only a myth that Japanese people can read English well (Kitao, 1983; Matsumura, 1984; Takefuta, 1982).

One of the causes of poor reading is English textbooks. Most English textbooks are not designed to teach language for the purpose of communication (Kitao, 1979). English reading textbooks for college students, in particular, have problems (Kitao & Kitao, 1982). Authors and editors of these textbooks do not bother to, for example, make use of visual aids to motivate students to read or make use of exercises to help students increase their reading skills or speed. Most textbooks just provide a reading text, notes which include explanations of unknown vocabulary, people, places, backgrounds, words with special cultural meaning, and possibly grammatical points.

The Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET), a professional organizations for college English teachers, which has about 1,300 members, published a paper, A Study of Present and Future College English Teaching from Instructor's Viewpoint

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(Koike et al, 1983). This paper reports that 80% of English classes for non-English majors are for reading. Among those, 60% of the classes emphasize intensive reading carried out based on translation. Less than 20% of the classes emphasize extensive reading and improving reading speed. It also reports that about 80% of English teachers are not satisfied with the quality of English textbooks.

Previous Research on College Students' Reading Ability

A series of studies on Japanese college students' reading comprehension in English was done between 1980 and 1984, using more than 5,000 students in eleven universities. These studies showed that Japanese students could read less than 100 words per minute, could not grasp main ideas well, did not understand constructions of paragraphs, could not express information they had gained in reading, could not combine ideas, and had poor vocabularies (Kitao & Miyamoto, 1982; Kitao & Miyamoto, 1983; Kitao & Yoshida, 1985; Kitao, Kitao, Yoshida & Yoshida, 1985; Kitao, Yoshida & Yoshida, 1986; Yoshida & Kitao, 1986).

Recent Trends of College English Textbooks

It appears to us that college English textbooks have changed a great deal over the last few years. The English used in the textbooks is easier, the typeface is larger, the textbooks themselves are larger, they have fewer pages, and there are more visuals such as photos and drawings. A few textbooks have color pictures. Many of them have audio tapes. Even a video tape has appeared. Also, more non-literary material and more material intended for non-native speakers of English is being used.

We speculate, based on information from various publishers, that this is due to the change of English proficiency of college students, because their junior high school and high school English curriculum was changed several years ago by the Course of Study determined by the Ministry of Education. The Course of Study reduced the number of required hours in English classes and decreased the number of vocabulary words and grammatical structures required at each level (Kitao, Kitao, Nozawa, & Yamamoto, 1985). Another reason for the changes is that the communicative aspect of English is being emphasized more, because Japanese people are having more direct contact with foreigners.

Purpose of the Study

Before doing this study, we investigated previous studies on college textbooks. We could not find any statistical studies describing textbooks published in Japan. The purpose of this study was to analyze the 182 English reading textbooks (out of a total of 232 English textbooks) published by 26 publishers for the 1985 academic year. We also compared these to textbooks published in previous years in order to identify trends in English textbooks. Since we could not find statistical studies for other years, this comparison is based on our previous experience.

Methods of the Study

For the academic year of 1985, a total of 213 college English textbooks were published by 26 Japanese publishers, including fifteen College English Textbook Association members. Of these textbooks, 150 were traditional reading textbooks (TRTs)

specifically for reading classes. TRTs are textbooks which have main texts and notes, and sometimes a few comprehension questions. The remaining 32 textbooks were new reading textbooks (NRTs). NRTs have main texts and have other exercises in addition to comprehension questions. NRTs emphasize all around English as well as reading.

As a research project, we evaluated these 182 textbooks both objectively and subjectively in a number of different areas in order to get an idea of the situation of English textbook publication in Japan. Objective evaluation was done by two researchers, which allowed the accuracy to be verified. The subjective evaluation was done by six researchers, and results were averaged for each item. We analyzed the results by computer using SPSS.

Results of the Study: 182 Textbooks

If we had one overall impression of these textbooks, it was to feel that students must have a difficult time getting interested in the English classes that use them. In several of the areas that we evaluated, textbooks would appear uninteresting to students.

A student's first impression of a textbook is likely to be influenced by the cover. However, few publishers took advantage of the cover to attract students' interest. Many covers were a plain color, with only the title of the book and the name of the author(s). Some did have interesting or colorful pictures or drawings which might give students at least an initial interest in the textbook.

After looking at the cover of the textbook, students probab-

ly glance through the book and see if it looks interesting, and this also contributes to their first impression. Unfortunately, few of the books had layouts that would be likely to attract students and give them a good first impression of the textbook. One third of the books (58 books) had no pictures; others had only one picture at the beginning. A few textbooks had pictures, drawings, diagrams, etc., inserted in the text. These broke up the text so that it looked less "intimidating" and more interesting to students (and would later give students visual help in understanding the information in the textbook.) The most common visual aids are illustrations and black and white photos (an average of 5.6 and 5.0 respectively in each textbook). Maps (0.5) and color photos (0.1) are not often used.

One problem we found is that many of the visual aids were not necessarily closely related to the content. Most of them have nothing to do with the content, and some were confusing.

There are only four sizes of textbooks: B6 (185x130mm), 46 (200x140), A5 (210x150), B5 (260x185). Sixty-eight textbooks are B6, 5 are 46, 102 are A5, and 7 are B5. A5-sized textbooks are new and are larger than traditional college textbooks (B6 and 46). We were surprised that it is the most common size now. B5-size textbooks are very new and getting more popular. Until recent years, B6 and 46 were most common. We speculate that the reason textbooks are getting larger is related to the use of larger type face and the increase of visual aids and exercises.

The average number of pages in a textbook is 105. Main texts take up an average of 68 pages. Notes average 22 pages,

exercises, 7 pages, and other, 8 pages.

Since Japanese classes meet about 25 times over the course of an academic year and generally only use one textbook during that time, this means that students read 2-3 pages of text in a 90-100 minute class. This figure is also much lower than the 70-100 pages of main text suggested by JACET as an adequate number (Koike, et al, 1983).

About the third of the textbooks (66) do not have audio tapes. JACET reports that 609 out of 971 teachers use audio tapes frequently (Koike, et al, 1983). Some textbooks still ignore the phonetic aspects of language teaching. Most of tapes include only the reading of the main texts, and some of them do not sound natural.

For main texts, essays (62) are most common, followed by short stories (42), and novels (11). However, literature (68), including short stories (42), novels (11), drama (5), poetry (2), and autobiographies (8), is the major area of content.

Few textbooks include culture with small c, the daily aspects of life in English-speaking countries.

There are 6 textbooks on newspapers and 2 on broadcasting, which provide different literary forms of English.

We felt that the content of many of the textbooks did not reflect the interests of a broad section of Japanese college students. While obviously no subject is going to interest all students, it seemed to us that publishers and authors should emphasize subjects that would be likely to interest as many students as possible. Topics such as detailed explanations of

the architectural features of English cathedrals, the social history of gothic and renaissance art, Britain in the 1880's, and a technical discussion of dialects of American English would be unlikely to interest most students. While literature of English-speaking people certainly has a place in the teaching of English, many of the pieces of literature chosen would be likely to have little interest except to literature majors. Also, novels are difficult to teach due to their length; students have trouble following the thread of the plot over a long period of time.

Ninety-six textbooks (53%) are made up of excerpts with Japanese notes, and these are the most common. Thirty-five textbooks (19%) are written for non-native speakers of English, 13 (7%) for Japanese, and 9 (5%) rewritten for non-native speakers. Most of the texts are still not designed for a Japanese audience, but texts intended for non-native audiences in general or Japanese audiences in particular are increasing very rapidly.

In some of the books, the English used was extremely difficult. Abstract ideas were expressed in long, complex sentences with many difficult words. Such difficult English would only succeed in frustrating and discouraging students. Literature in particular included much non-standard English. Except for those at a very advanced level, students would have difficulty understanding it and become discouraged.

The average number of words per sentence was 20.6. Ten texts had 40 or more words per sentence, and 74 had 20 or more words per sentence. Such long sentences are difficult for Japanese college students to read and comprehend.

The number of unfamiliar words (words which are not included in the JACET 4,000-word list [a list compiled by JACET of 4,000 words that college students should learn]) per 100 words were 6 or more in 34 texts. In our experience, it is very difficult for students to read material with more than 5% unfamiliar words. However, the average percentage of unfamiliar words is only 3.3%, which is much lower than we expected.

One important aspect of learning a foreign language is learning about the culture(s) of the people who speak it. (Being able to learn about other cultures is also interesting and therefore motivating to students.) Some textbooks included information about English-speaking cultures, mainly the United States (61), Britain (47), or a combination of the two (42), for a total of 150 textbooks (82%). Five textbooks compare Japanese culture or society with that of an English-speaking country. Only one text deals with an English-speaking country other than the U.S. and Britain.

Authors of 129 textbooks (71%) are American or British. Students are studying mainly those two countries and people. However, one new trends in 1980s is that the textbooks written by native speakers of English and Japanese together are increasing.

While literature written by or about English-speaking people would reflect their daily lives, attitudes toward interpersonal relationships, etc., some of the pieces of literature were written thirty or more years ago and do not reflect daily life and attitudes in the present. Fourteen texts (8%) were published before World War II, and four of them (2%) were published in the

nineteenth century. The English used in these textbooks is rather outdated. However, 73 (40%) contained main texts published since 1980, and there is a trend toward using new publications in textbooks.

Many of the textbooks had notes almost exclusively in Japanese, rather than defining difficult words in English. The problem with this is that it encourages students to translate the text into Japanese rather than to try to comprehend in English what they are reading. Only two texts did not have any Japanese explanations.

From our points of view as teachers who might consider using one of these textbooks, a very serious problem with most of them is the lack of exercises. Only about one quarter of the textbooks (41) have exercises; of those that did, some have inadequate exercises. Most of these have only one or two types of exercises with a few questions covering only superficial aspects of the reading, without requiring students to look at relationships among pieces of information, make inferences from what they read, etc. Some of the textbooks have only dictation exercises (dialogues with blanks that students fill in while listening to a tape) or translation exercises. Unless a teacher has the time, energy, and self-confidence to write exercises, there is little for students to do but translate the texts word-for-word into Japanese. While translating is useful in some cases, it will not help students develop skill in reading for communicative purposes. Students need help in comprehending the material in English and developing their reading skills.

Another problem with more than eighty percent of the textbooks (149) was that they do not have teacher's manuals. This is a problem, because teachers may need suggestions on how to use the textbook and background information on the subject(s) dealt with in the text. However, teacher's manuals usually have only answers for exercises. Only two manuals have thorough information about how to use the textbooks or background information for the reading texts.

Comparisons between TRTs and NRTs

New reading textbooks (NRTs) tend to be larger. Twenty-six (81%) are B5 and A5, while only 83 (55%) traditional reading textbooks (TRTs) are those sizes. NRTs have more visual aids and exercises and tend to be bigger. However, even many TRTs have increased in size. The trend is toward larger textbooks.

NRTs have an average of 36 pages of exercises while TRTs have only 1 page. This is the biggest difference between the two. NRTs emphasize performance in the target language. TRTs average more pages in the main text (73 pages or 69% of the total pages) than NRTs (42 pages or 42%). However, the portion of notes to the main text are almost the same. NRTs still emphasize notes as much as TRTs do. It seems to be difficult to escape from the traditional language teaching style. However, two NRTs have notes entirely in English. As a matter of fact, they do not have any Japanese anywhere in them. This is a very new trend.

Teacher's manuals accompanied 21 NRTs (66%) but only 12 TRTs (7%). One reason for this is that NRTs have more exercises and need answer keys.

NRTs have a variety of exercises, including comprehension checks, vocabulary exercises, and discussion exercises, because they emphasize language activities. However, some of the textbooks do not have adequate exercises.

Audio tapes accompanied 25 NRTs (78%) and 91 TRTs (60%). More and more textbooks tend to have audio tapes. However, even NRTs have tapes of only main texts, not activities or exercises. One reason for unsatisfactory audio tapes is that they are usually given to teachers without charge, and the publishers cannot make profits on them at all.

The content of NRTs is mixed (31%), essays (31%), and short stories (13%). No forms of literature other than short stories are included in NRTs. TRTs have literature (43%) and essays (35%). Literature is still dominant in TRTs. NRTs have mixed passages with different literary forms, but most of TRTs have only one literary form.

Some NRTs (34%) have Japanese authors, and this is a new trend. Also, 56% of the NRTs are written for non-native speakers of English, while 63% of TRTs are just excerpts of original English books. Only 6% of the NRTs use excerpts.

As far as we were able to tell, none of the main texts of the NRTs were written before 1970, and they are relatively new. NRTs emphasize current English.

The average number of words per sentence in NRTs is 17.1 while that of TRTs is 21.4. Almost 80% of the NRTs have less than 20 words per sentence and none has more than 40. Unfamiliar words per 100 words in NRTs is 1.5 while in TRTs, 3.7. NRTs use

much easier vocabulary. We can assume that NRTs are much easier to read than TRTs.

As for the purpose of the textbooks, the purpose of 22% of the NRTs but none of the TRTs is language teaching; all around education in 78% in TRTs but none of the NRTs; mixed in 63% of the NRTs and 5% of the TRTs. We cannot classify 16% of NRTs and 17% of TRTs according to purpose. We assume that authors or editors making these textbooks did not consider the specific purposes carefully.

Conclusion

In this study, we identified a number of trends in textbooks published in 1985.

1) Textbooks are larger, with fewer pages.
2) Textbooks have more pictures and other visual aids.
3) English used in the textbooks is easier.
4) More non-literary texts and more texts intended specifically for non-native speakers are used.
5) More textbooks use recently written main texts.
6) More textbooks have exercises to supplement the main text.
7) More textbooks emphasize developing language skills.
8) More textbooks have Japanese authors or co-authors.
9) More textbooks make use of main texts written specifically for non-native speakers.
10) More textbooks have audio tapes.
11) More textbooks have teacher's manuals.

Judging from this overview of recently-published textbooks, we feel that it is important for publishers to carefully consider

first of all the interests of students and second how students can be better helped to understand the English they are reading and to develop reading skills.

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